Rice Debater Selected to Represent U.S.

Rice debater Aparna Bhaduri has been selected by the National Parliamentary Debate Association to represent the U.S. against the Irish national champions in the opening ceremonies of the U.S. national tournament this year. Every year three of the very best American debaters are competitively selected to debate the Irish national team to kick off the tournament on March 27. This long standing tradition has honored some of the best debaters in the country over the years.

Bhaduri is the only Rice debater ever selected to join this very elite group.

The following is a press release about the event and the debaters from the NPDA.

Pena-Guzman, Fleharty and Bhaduri will debate the Irish

“*I believe that the fact that a white man from the Midwest, an Indian woman from Texas and a Latino from the West Coast will represent ‘America’ is very telling of the community’s commitment to diversity and its appreciation of difference.*”

David Pena-Guzman

Students from Nevada, Colorado and Texas will represent the National Parliamentary Debate Association in the annual Irish/U.S. debate at nationals.

David Pena-Guzman of the University of Nevada-Reno, Matt Fleharty of the United States Air Force Academy and Aparna Bhaduri of Rice University will debate the three Irish champions on Friday, March 27 at 4:30 p.m. at the opening assembly of the NPDA national tournament. This debate will be held at the Stockton Grand Hotel, near the University of Pacific in Stockton, Calif.

Three of Ireland’s best debaters - Andrea Mulligan and David Hopkins of Trinity College Dublin, and Jeremy Kinsella of University College Dublin - will oppose the Americans.

The students representing the United States are all top debaters whose lives and contributions extend well beyond forensics.

All three debaters are highly successful. Pena-Guzman and his partner Max Alderman are ranked 6th in the nation, Fleharty and his partner Josh Seefried are 16th, and Bhaduri and her partner Gary Johnson are 41st, out of the more than 1000 ranked teams.

Pena-Guzman, 22, is a senior majoring in Women’s Studies and Philosophy carrying a 3.8 GPA. He plans to pursue his doctorate in philosophy and, possibly, earn a law degree once he obtains the PhD. He’s keeping both doors open - to a teaching career or a law career.

Pena-Guzman is a politically active student who has volunteered for organizations such as Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada and the Latino Research Center. He is equally active
on campus where he is head of organizations such as Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER). During the 2006 elections he was hired by the Nevada State Democratic Party as the “Director or Latino Outreach and Media Relations” to organize and implement a state-wide project to increase voter turnout among Hispanic and Latino populations.

Pena-Guzman was born in Guadalajara, Mexico. His inspiring life story includes coming to America at age 15 without speaking English – and joining debate as a way to learn English.

“I was born in Mexico in 1986 in Guadalajara, Jalisco,” he says. “I lived there for the first 15 years of my life in a very small and very Catholic town by the name of Talpa de Allende, where religious tourism is the main source of income. There, I grew up with my mother and my grandparents (who have been an incredible source of strength and encouragement) in an environment very rich in culture and tradition: pilgrimages, culture festivals, endless quinceñeras, block parties, celebrations and a myriad of religious holidays were an everyday aspect of my childhood.

“Then, two days after I turned 15, my mom and I migrated to a small, Mormon town in Southern Nevada, where I finished high school. The year was 2002. My mom Lidia, step-dad Juan, and my three siblings Josue, Michael and Adriana still live there with our dog ‘Frida’ and our cat ‘Blanca Nubes.’ Upon graduating high school in 2005, I moved to Reno, where I have been attending college ever since. This summer, I will be moving once again to an unknown place for graduate study.”

What’s Pena-Guzman like? Well, van trips reveal some things.

“I think debate van trips are much like life: you can remain uncomfortable within the limits you are given, or you can sprawl out into utter comfort by inflating what counts as personal space,” he says. “Because of this, no one ever wants to sit by me in the van—because they know that sooner or later, one way or another, I will find a way to cuddle in, sprawl out, and pile on top until I find a suitable arrangement that satisfies my sleep requirements.

“I just happen to think that Peter McWilliams was right, ‘Comfort zones are most often expanded through discomfort.’ My team resents me for it...if anybody asks, it is because they have a bad outlook on life. Period. Oh, and also because white people have weird ideas about ‘personal bubbles’ and ‘personal space’ that, after seven years, my mind still cannot comprehend.”

Pena-Guzman’s debate accomplishments are many including final rounds at NAU, Western Washington and UPS – and top speaker awards at Berkeley and the Point Loma Round Robin. He placed third and won a speaker award at a tournament in the People’s Republic of China. He is coached by Phil Sharp and Keith Osborne.

Pena-Guzman is pleased to be participating in the Irish debate.

“It will be an honor to be an ambassador of the debate community and represent an activity I have been a part of for several years of my life,” says Pena-Guzman. “It will be an amazing opportunity for us to compete against the Irish in a friendly yet competitive atmosphere that symbolizes the value of good-will and dialogue that the international community, and all of us as individuals, should always strive for. I also believe that the fact that a white man from the Midwest, an Indian woman from Texas and a Latino from the West Coast will represent ‘America’ is very telling of the community’s commitment to diversity and its appreciation of
difference. In that sense, being a member of the community is a privilege that I am glad to share with many folks.”

Fleharty, 22, is an economics major at the United States Air Force Academy. Fleharty has a five-year commitment to the Air Force.

“If law school pans out, a 15-year commitment,” he says. “After serving in the Air Force, I would like to go into politics in the state of Oklahoma, possibly as a national representative in my home state.”

He plans to attend law school through the Air Force’s Funded Legal Education program and become a JAG, a judge advocate general. He also hopes to visit Spain and run with the bulls some day.

Fleharty’s life reflects service to others. He has worked as a counselor for the Boys State program in Oklahoma, for example. He’s a young man of considerable determination. He was turned down by the Air Force the first time he applied, even though his twin brother was accepted into that same class. But Matt worked hard to improve his application and was accepted in the next class.

Fleharty’s debate accomplishments are many including a recent win at the Hatfield tournament, and prior success at NPTE (quarterfinalist) and NPDA (octafinalist). He is coached by Captain Kristen Loy and Carrie Menapace.

So just who is Matt Fleharty, behind the uniform? He enjoys rafting, skiing, snowmobiling and outdoor recreation – and he’s a Calvin and Hobbes fan.

“I appreciated the comics ever since I was little and read them regularly to this day,” he says. “As I have matured, the life lessons and enjoyment I take away from the comics continue to astound me.”

He also loves animals.

“Particular dogs and tigers,” he says. “My favorite pet and the closest companion I have ever had, an Alaskan malamute named Bandit, passed away in November. My parents recently got a Chow named Shadow; however, I am a little reluctant to meet Shadow because our former Chow gave me the scar I have on the left side of my face when I was two years old.”

Fleharty has loved watching the Irish debates, but tires of all the Irish victories.

“Irish Debates present a unique challenge of combining education, quality of argumentation, and entertainment in front of a national audience. I look forward to meeting the Irish debaters and engaging in a great exchange of ideas with some of the best debaters in the world.

“My approach to the Irish debate is simple: adapt to the Irish and the audience. I believe we, the three Americans chosen to debate this Irish this year, are well-rounded competitors and skilled at modifying our style to suit varying situations. I am confident that the American parliamentary debate community will be pleasantly surprised by the American crew this year.

“My goal for the debate, as with every competition, is to win. We have home field advantage every year and still, the Irish never fail to win over our own crowd. I promised my fellow cadets
an American victory this year; I don’t think my friends will let me return to the Academy without one.”

Aparna Bhaduri, 20, is Biochemistry and Cell Biology and Political Science double major at Rice University. Bhaduri, with a 3.7 GPA, is headed to grad school in biochemistry to conduct cancer research and she also intends to be active in politics in the future. She already is involved in Alzheimer’s-related research at Rice University.

“I want to be a researcher/professor and become involved in politics by being a science advisory committee at either the state or national level,” she says. I also serve as a C.P. Snow Fellow for the Scientia Institute where I coordinate interactions between the student body and interdisciplinary activities/lectures on campus. This year we are working off the theme “Biopolitics” where we discuss the intersection of Biology and political issues ranging from Neurolaw to the politics of teaching evolution.”

Back home in Mequon, Wisconsin, (near Milwaukee) Bhaduri volunteered at a Community Center for Alzheimer and dementia patients. She has also tutored high school and college students in math, science and English.

Both of Bhaduri’s parents were born in India and are involved in the IT industry. Bhaduri’s forensics success includes both parliamentary debate and individual events. She advanced to outrounds at NPDA, won a second round bid to NPTE this year and has won speaker awards. She was a semi-finalist in extemporaneous speaking and a quarterfinalist in impromptu at the 2008 National Individual Events Tournament. She is coached by David Worth and Glenn Prince.

So, who is Aparna Bhaduri? She loves learning, that’s certain.

“I think that debate is another way for me to question my assumptions and beliefs about the world, which is why I enjoy it so much. I feel like the purpose in my life is to find answers, but without questions, you can’t get answers. Therefore debate is one way that I generate questions about society, culture, and thought. Learning is my favorite thing in life, which is why new experiences are so important to me, and why I want to teach so I can share my passion for learning on to my students.”

Bhaduri looks forward to the Irish debate.

“It is a privilege to be given the opportunity to debate the Irish,” she says. “It is an honor to represent the community and the Americans, and I think that it will be a great, rewarding experience. I am humbled by the chance, and think it is a testament to the community that they do represent diverse backgrounds of experience, culture, and dare I say it, even gender!”

As for the debate itself, Bhaduri hopes above all for a respectful evening of intercultural exchange.

“My hope for the debate is that it will be a lively intersection of cross-cultural interaction, wit, and energy,” she says. “This is a chance to use debate to learn about the world and our interactions with the Irish can hopefully be informative to the audience at large as well. I hope all of us will represent the community in an extremely classy, eloquent, fun way.”

And, of course, she’d be OK about winning.
“Hopefully we can win!” she says. “Of course debate is not all about winning and losing, but if we can represent our ideas and our opinions in a straightforward way, we can create a respectable, admirable image that will beg for votes. This is not about gamesmanship as much as it is about sportsmanship and eloquence.”

Pena-Guzman agrees.

“My hope for this year,” says Pena-Guzman, “is that the American team will actually be competitive and give the Irish a run for their money.”

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**Introducing the Irish champions**

**Three Irish students to tour America**

“I like to win. Not the argument necessarily, but the affection of those present.”

David Hopkins, Trinity College Dublin

Ireland has crowned its debating champions for 2009. A future lawyer, a future teacher and a future civil servant will oppose three top American debaters in a Friday, March 27, public debate that precedes the start of the NPDA national tournament in Stockton, Calif.

The winning Irish debate team and the top individual in the Irish Times Debate Final were crowned on Friday night Feb. 20 on the campus of the University of Limerick.

The winning team was the team from Trinity College was Andrea Mulligan and John Gallagher. The winning individual was Jeremy Kinsella of University College Dublin.

Since academic obligations prevent Gallagher from making the trip and because he enjoyed the tour last year, Gallagher has stepped aside for David Hopkins of Trinity College, the runner up individual this year.

**Andrea Mulligan, 22**, is in her final year as a law student at Trinity College Dublin. She plans a legal career as a barrister. She has been awarded a Fulbright Award to earn her Masters of Law, LL.M. at Harvard University.

Raised in the Dublin suburb of Castleknock, Mulligan has debated for six years, reaching the Irish Times Final twice before in 2007 and 2008 before winning this year. She has been a winner in numerous other debate events held in Galway, Istanbul and Dublin.
Asked to describe herself, Mulligan, daughter of a teacher and an accountant, says that she spends far too much time drinking...tea!

“And I love to chat with my roommates. I love music and singing and I volunteer at a charity called Friends of the Elderly.

“Traveling is probably my greatest passion. I traveled across South America with three close friends and had some of the strangest and most exciting experiences of my life. I also enjoy reading, going to comedy gigs, and really love shopping- I hope to do a lot of it in the US!”

And what is Mulligan like?

“I’m blunt, passionate, honest and very loyal,” she says. “The most important thing to me is friendship - and the thing I enjoy most in the world is good conversation. Especially if it takes place around good food! I love meeting interesting people and I’m confident the US trip is going to give us the chance to do that.”

Mulligan is proud to be representing Ireland.

“Ireland has a very long a proud tradition of great oratory so I hope we do that justice,” she says.

She can’t wait for the trip to begin.

**David Hopkins, 22,** is also in his final year at Trinity College Dublin where he is currently studying for a postgraduate diploma in education, having completed his English and History degree two years ago. He is preparing for a career teaching secondary school. He already has an offer to teach in a community school next year.

“From the time I was a child myself, through to my work in the National Children’s Office, I have always had an interest in the issues that affect young people of all ages,” he says. “Now, as a secondary school teacher, I will make that my professional endeavor. I hope that my contribution, in whatever capacity will have affected those that I have worked with for the better.”

Hopkins says he received some unusual encouragement from a teacher who was trying to guide his career choice.

“One of the older teachers took me to one side and said, ‘Don’t worry Dave, this is the best job in the world – it’s like being a dictator of a really small country...’ I would love to tell you that this was a great comfort to me, or even that elements of what he said were true...but I honestly haven’t thought too much about it, other than the fact that it was a German teacher who told me.”
Hopkins has reached the semi-finals of the Irish Times competition three times, before finishing as the runner-up in his fourth attempt. He’s been a National Mace finalist.

He loves debating for lots of reasons.

“Superficially, because it affords me the opportunity to go on all expenses paid tours of the States,” he says. “Beyond that, because rhetoric can make fools of the informed.”

Son of a teacher and a special needs assistant, Hopkins also grew up in Castleknock, outside Dublin. He has two younger brothers, twins, who excel at debating, soccer, Gaelic football and piano.

Hopkins was an Irish student representative for an International conference in the United States. He was chair of the National Youth Parliament, and was part of a team that won a provincial soccer competition!

“And I got drunk with Will Ferrell and his dad in 2008,” he laughs.

So what is David like?

“I like to moan about not having enough free time as I whittle away days playing Fifa or watching ‘West Wing,’ ” he says. “On more constructive days I enjoy watching or playing any sport known to man, from curling to elephant polo, or watching films with my girlfriend.”

And what values guide David?

“Well, you’ve got to be busy to get anything done,” he said. “And I’ve realized that if you ever have to find your feet, you can listen to those around you but you have to in the end find that space yourself.”

He’d love to beat the Americans, but he takes a more philosophical view of the occasion.

“I’d like to win,” he says. “Not the argument necessarily, but the affection of those present.”

Jeremy Kinsella, 23, is in his final year studying politics at University College Dublin. He is studying philosophy and is currently working on a masters in political theory, so he expects he’ll be a civil servant. He intends to apply to embassies and the foreign affairs office “for hopeful employment.”

Kinsella has debated for five years, reaching the semi-finals twice and the finals once. He was a finalist at the Cambridge competition, the Irish Mace debating competition and the Irish National Law Debates.

He says he likes arguing, winning and “hearing the sound of my own voice.”
“I love the sense of power, the fact that everyone in the room is listening to you,” he says. “The ability to speech to a crowd and try and engage with them and empathize with you. The ability to convince people who are willing to be convinced and the general buzz and enjoyment of thinking and speaking in public.”

He credits his family for his debating success.

“My dad likes to think I got my debating talent from his as we debate everything in our house and have regular family discussions and debates. These are obviously very casual.”

Kinsella has lots of ways to fill free time.

“I’m a fanatic soccer fan and love Tottenham Hotspur fc!” he says. “I love movies and have a DVD collection of over 300 movies! I also love my Playstation 3 and gaming and all the usual stuff with my friends and having a few drinks and just spending time with the people I love. I’ll chat to anyone and love comedy! Anything by Ricky Gervias is simply sublime and would keep me laughing for hours.”

When asked to describe himself, the subject keeps coming back to friends.

“I’m a genuine, and really easy going! I really love my friends and really love college more for them then the education and academic aspects, I couldn’t think of anything better than an evening in with all my mates a few drinks and a movie and just having general banter. It’s the little things.

“College and things just end up stressing me out with workloads and deadlines but at the end of the day if you’ve good friends and family any problems are insignificant!

“To be honest it’s quite difficult to describe myself. I’m the kind of guy who’s a pretty open book and after a couple of hours with me you’ll know exactly what I’m like! I love a good time, I’m a nice guy and I’m always looking to have fun and make new friends and have enjoyable experiences!”

At the Irish Times Final, all 12 debaters spoke once for 7 minutes, while answering questions during their remarks. The topic for the evening was “This house believes the partition of Ireland should remain permanent.”

The proposition cited the differences between the two cultures as reasons to let them remain separate. The opposition speakers argued that the dream of unification should be pursued and that it is in the long-term interest of both.

Dr. Edwin Walsh, founding president of the University of Limerick served as chair for the evening.

Barry Glynn, a team winner in 2006, convened the final debate.
Judges for the final included Eoin McVey, managing editor of the Irish Times; Prof. Paul McCutcheon head of the school of law at the University of Limerick; Dave Whelan BL, a former team winner in 2005; Jarlath Ryan BL, a former team runner up in 1996; and Brent Northup, an American forensics coach from Carroll College in Montana.

The Irish Times, Ireland’s “serious paper of record,” has sponsored the Irish Times debating championship for 49 years. This year the Times sponsored 16 preliminary debates throughout the country, which drew 124 teams. Each preliminary resulted in the advancement of the top teams, plus the best individuals from among the losing teams.

There were eight second round debates and four semi-final debates, which set the stage for the final in Limerick.

The championship final is a black-tie event, with all debaters and judges in formal dress, and many members of the audience in tuxedoes and formal gowns as well. The Limerick crowd was responsive and appreciative throughout the debate. Ireland takes debate seriously, and takes pride in its history of inspired rhetoric.

The debating competition, which began in 1960, is open to all students, whether undergraduates or graduate students or law students. The winners have included many individuals who later distinguished themselves in Irish politics and Irish law.

The winners will participate in a showcase debate at NPDA on March 27 against three top American debaters: David Pena-Guzman of the University of Reno-Nevada; Matt Flaherty of the United States Air Force Academy and Aparna Bhaduri of Rice University.

All three Americans are part of top American teams and have enviable records throughout their debate careers.

The Irish will visit five American universities in Colorado, Alaska, California, Florida, and Texas before returning to Ireland on Tuesday, April 7.

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